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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [HR](#) [NATO](#)

SUBJECT: ASD RICARDEL MEETINGS WITH CROATIAN MINISTER OF
DEFENSE RONCEVIC AND PRESIDENT MESIC, APRIL 29

Classified By: JUSTIN FRIEDMAN, POLMIL OFF. REASON: 1.4 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

1. (C) On April 29, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy (Acting), Ms. Mira Ricardel, accompanied by Ambassador Ralph Frank, met with President Stjepan Mesic and Berislav Roncevic, Minister of Defense. In both meetings defense reform and the possibility of expanding Croatia,s presence in Afghanistan were discussed.

MESIC MEETING

2. (SBU) Mesic expressed his opinion that the relationship with the United States is good. Mesic laid out his two strategic goals: First, membership in the European Union and second membership in NATO. On the European Union, Mesic noted that Croatia is expecting negotiations soon. He then pronounced that the Armed Forces were working to be in compliance with NATO standards.

3. (SBU) A/ASD Ricardel congratulated Mesic on his re-election in January 2005. She agreed that the level of bilateral cooperation with Croatia was good and related that reforms under way are impressive.

4. (C) Noting the U.S. appreciation for Croatia,s contribution in Afghanistan, A/ASD related that she had discussed with SACEUR General Jones the value of non-NATO member participation in improving those countries, interoperability with NATO. A/ASD Ricardel requested that Croatia consider contributing to a new Provincial Reconstruction Team being established in Chaghcharan by Lithuania. She then noted that the new democratically elected government of Iraq should be welcomed by Croatia. She observed that when Croatia was just getting started, recognition and support by the international community were vital to normalizing Croatia,s status. She commented that Croatia,s establishment of diplomatic relations with Iraq is a step in the right direction and recommended the establishment of a commercial office in Baghdad.

5. (C) Mesic stated that it would be acceptable for Croatia to increase its presence in Afghanistan. He also noted that he has an open invitation from Afghan president Hamad Karzai and that he was likely to act on that invitation in the future. As for Iraq, the opening of diplomatic relations was a modest step for Croatia as these relations had never existed under Saddam Hussein. Additionally, the state-owned oil company INA has established an office in Baghdad and this will be strengthened as more Croatian companies engage.

ICTY COOPERATION

6. (SBU) A/ASD Ricardel stated that the U.S. works with the European Union and that both have a similar goal with respect to cooperation with The Hague tribunal. She noted that she had heard from Prime Minister Sanader on the action plan for Gotovina and expressed her hope that it is fully realized. A/ASD Ricardel underscored that while Croatia had accomplished much on ICTY cooperation, the final step is still crucial for fulfilling Croatia,s Hague requirements.

7. (SBU) Mesic noted that on ICTY cooperation, privatization, and the rule of law Croatia,s actions were not credible before 2000. Additional problems came from the overt politicization of the Police and Armed Forces. Mesic noted that this period of history had closed. He then asserted that attempts to tell the U.S. Defense Department that he was politicizing the Armed Forces through the implication that the President appoints officers directly is misleading and untrue. He asserted that attempts to amend the Constitution on this issue are wrong. Mesic added that some people want to deprive the president of this right to approve general officers. (COMMENT: Mesic may have been alluding to an error in the draft of the OSD-funded contractor Defense Assessment

passed to the MOD prior to this visit. This mistake will be explained to the Office of the President and the MOD and the language will be redacted from the Assessment text.)

18. (SBU) A/ASD Ricardel stated that the USG does not comment on Croatia's constitutional issues and that we have not had any discussions with the MOD on this matter.

19. In conclusion A/ASD Ricardel noted that Croatia can play a valuable role in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) given its geography and role in the region. She also related that the United States values its relationship with Croatia and that we want it to continue to improve it.

RONCEVIC MEETING

10. (SBU) A/ASD Ricardel's meeting with MOD Roncevic was very amiable. A/ASD Ricardel began by noting that efforts to make the formulation of the Strategic Defense Review (SDR) open to the public are good for transparency. She then observed that NATO would be looking at this document as an explanation of how Croatia intends to spend its resources. She then advised that a country needed to make a distinction between a modernization goal that is useful and those that may look powerful but cannot be used. Stressing the role of transformation of modern defense forces, A/ASD noted that every country joining NATO needed to bring its own niche capabilities and that Croatia's Military Police capacity is useful as this was historically a shortfall for NATO-led stability operations.

11. (SBU) Roncevic opened by explaining that despite rumors to the contrary that the MOD and the Joint General Staff were one system. Equally important was that with the finalization of the SDR, both the government and the executive were unified on defense reform issues. Roncevic noted that the release of the SDR to the public would have to take place after the 15 May municipal elections for political reasons, but that the MOD would try to publish the final version of the document shortly after.

12. (C) Roncevic thanked A/ASD Ricardel for her earlier praise of the MPs and Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) contributions in Afghanistan. He noted that future rotations of the MP platoon were already planned and that on 4 May the Adriatic Charter countries would sign a technical agreement required for their combined deployment of a medical team to ISAF. Roncevic then related that Croatia is considering increasing its PRT contributions and was looking specifically at the PRTs led by Germany and Lithuania. Finally, he noted that a senior-level delegation from the Parliament and Office of the President would travel to Afghanistan in May.

13. (C) A/ASD Ricardel noted that prior to this meeting she had held useful discussions at the Sabor on the need for flexibility for the Armed Forces. She relayed that she had urged the parliamentary officials to use their position as representatives of the people to explain why this flexibility is important. A/ASD related that she was very pleased that Croatia was considering increasing its PRT contributions, especially in the Lithuanian PRT. This contribution will help Croatia's deployed forces gain greater interoperability with NATO, with the added benefit of recognition. A/ASD then urged MOD Roncevic to contact the Danish MOD as she believed that his vigorous push for the reforming of the Danish Armed Forces could be a useful example for Croatia.

13. (SBU) Roncevic noted that he would be attempting to establish Minister-level ties to the Danish MOD in the near future. He then talked about the opening of regional cooperation with Croatia's neighbors by noting that Croatia had recently accredited Defense Attaches to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia-Montenegro. He also related that Croatia had offered to help those countries with their defense reform efforts.

14. (SBU) A/ASD received this news as a positive step and noted that one aspect of NATO review for aspirant countries is whether they are a net contributor or a net consumer of security in their region. She continued that it seems Croatia is on the right track in this regard. She also expressed satisfaction that Croatia had become the chair for the Southeast Europe Defense Ministerial (SEDM) Working Group on Counterproliferation, Border Security and Counterterrorism (CBSC). This is an important role for Croatia to play in the region.

15. (C) Roncevic concluded by saying that Croatia accepts this role and hopes to promote greater cooperation in the region, especially on the sharing of military intelligence. He added that during his mandate, the Military Security Agency (VSA) had done good work and that several inter-government agreements on the security of military

information had been concluded.

16. (U) A/ASD CLEARED THIS MESSAGE.

FRANK

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